The Builder.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 30, 1852.

SCENE, a drawing-room in the house of a Serjeant learned in the law, near Belgrave-square; time, after dinner and before the tea. The walls are covered with pictures,—good ones too,—and the tables with books, into which latter the gentlemen who have just "come up" dive restlessly, while ladies sit around. Have you seen this? and have you seen that? says the worthy host, seeking to amuse. "Here is a bundle fresh from France, but nothing amongst them, I fear, that will do for the *Builder*." "Let us look, worthy sir; there are few books from which you may not get *something*, whatever your field of study may be,"—and the paper-covered books—produce of Parisian presses—were duly overhauled. Amongst these was one headed, "*Caprices et Zigzags*," by Mons. Gautier. What is this about? "Tour in Belgium," "A Journey beyond the Barriers," "A Trip to London." It is useful occasionally to see how we look in another's glass,—to learn what our neighbours think of us, and how the things that are always about us appear when viewed from a foreign point of sight. Not long ago we gave an intelligent Dutchman's opinions of London and its monuments, which certainly were not without their value. Let us see, then, what Mons. Gautier says of London: he honestly premises that he does not know a word of English, and cares less for buildings than for the people who may be in them. It would seem, too, the visit was made some time ago, notwithstanding that the book is but just now published, for he speaks of the hoarding, with huge "posters" upon it, round the Nelson Monument, Trafalgar-square, and of the Thames Tunnel as only in progress. We do not intend to follow him all through our monster metropolis, with its mixed misery and splendour, greatness and dirt, but will skim his pages, and take a morsel here and there. The port of London was a marvel to him, as it is to most foreigners, and he seems to be decidedly of opinion that Englishmen belong rather to the water than the land, and have fins hidden somewhere under their clothes. "Never shall I forget," says he, when he had reached the Custom House, "the magnificent spectacle that presented itself to my eyes; the gigantic arches of London-bridge, on their five colossal piers, traversing the river, stood out gloomily against a background of setting sun, while the disc of the planet, inflamed as a buckler reddened in the furnace, descended exactly behind the middle arch, which traced upon its orb a black segment, of a boldness and vigour incomparable." Strange to say, the great width of the streets struck him forcibly, the lowness of the houses rendering this width more evident; and of course he was horrified by the discoloration effected everywhere by the smoke. "You might think that all the buildings were black-leaded," he exclaims; and he refers, with a sigh, to the buildings in Spain, which the sun has clothed in a robe of purple and saffron. The quick step of the English in the streets, the enormous space occupied by London, the size of the parks, all excite his attention. Waterloo-bridge he calls the finest in the world. "Passing from Charing-cross," he says, "you find at the corner of Trafalgar-square, the *façade* of Northumberland-house, recognisable by a great lion, with his tail in the air, of mediocre character, although novel; this is the Lion of the Percies, and never did heraldic lion more abuse the right that he had to take upon himself fabulous forms. They boast much of the marble staircase which leads to the apartments, and of the collection of pictures, which is composed, like all other collections, of Raffaelle, of Titian, of Paul Veronese, of Rubens, of Albert Durer, of Vandyke, to say nothing of old Franks, Salvator Rosa, &c. I do not wish to throw a doubt here upon the gallery of the Duke of Northumberland, which I have not seen, but I believe there is little dependance to be placed on the ancient pictures which you find in England: although they have for the most part been bought at ridiculously high prices, they are in general merely copies. The number of Murillos which I have seen fabricated at Seville for the sake of the English, has put me on my guard against their Raffaelles. This, however, need not afflict any one: he who imagines he possesses a Raffaelle or a Titian, and who, in reality, has nothing but seven or eight coats of varnish and a rich frame, need not be the less happy for this. It is only Faith that saves."

Thus far our author. Piccadilly, Pall Mall, Regent-street, he finds the most brilliant portion of London; and he goes on to speak of the architecture of the houses, or rather palaces, which form this quarter: grandiose and monumental, although in composition hybrid, and often equivocal. Never has one seen, he exclaims, so many columns and pediments, even in an antique city. The Romans and the Greeks were certainly not so Roman and so Greek as the subjects of her Britannic Majesty. You walk between two ranks of Parthenons; you only see Temples of Vesta and of Jupiter Stator, and the illusion would be complete if you did not read in the intercolumniations inscriptions of this sort,—'Gas Company,' 'Life Assurance.' The Ionic order is well shown, the Doric still better; but the Pæstum column enjoys a prodigious vogue: they put it everywhere. These colonnades and pediments are not wanting at first sight in a certain aspect of splendour, but all these magnificences are for the most part in Roman cement, for stone is rare in London. It is especially in the new churches that the architectural genius of the English has displayed the most *bizarre* cosmopolitanism, and made the strangest confusion of styles. Over an Egyptian propylon appears a Greek order, mixed up with Roman arches, the whole surmounted by a Gothic spire: it would make the meanest Italian peasant shrug his shoulders. With very few exceptions, all the modern monuments are in this style! The English are rich, active, industrious; they can forge iron, subjugate steam, wrestle with matter in every sense, invent machines of frightful power; they can be great poets; but art, strictly speaking, will always be to them a stumbling block: they feel this, and it irritates them; their national pride is wounded by it; they understand that at the bottom, notwithstanding their prodigious material civilisation, they are but varnished barbarians. [Tolerably cool this.] Lord Elgin, so violently anathematised by Lord Byron, has committed a useless sacrilege: the bas-reliefs of the Parthenon, brought to London, have inspired no one. The gift of the plastic arts is refused to the races of the north; the sun which puts objects in relief, shows the outlines, and gives to each thing its true form, lightens these wan countries with a ray too oblique, which cannot be made sufficient by the leaden light of gas. In Protestantism he finds a serious impediment to the progress of art. London, he says, may become Rome, but it will certainly never become Athens: this last fate is reserved for Paris. In the first we have gold, power, material development in the highest degree; a gigantic exaggeration of all that can be done with money, patience, and will; the useful, the comfortable; but the agreeable and the beautiful, no. In the latter, we find intelligence, grace, flexibility, delicacy, facile comprehension of harmony and beauty; in one word, the Greek qualities. The English will excel in all that it is possible to do, and particularly in that which is impossible. They would establish a Bible Society in Pekin, they would come to Timbuctoo in yellow gloves and varnished boots, in a state of the greatest *respectability*; they may invent machines which will produce 600,000 pairs of stockings in a minute, and they would even discover new countries in order to get rid of the aforesaid pairs of stockings; but they could never make a bonnet that a French grisette would put upon her head. If taste could be bought, they would pay well for it. Happily God has reserved to himself the distribution of two or three little things upon which the gold of the powerful of the earth has no effect — genius, beauty, and happiness. [And these, of course, have been wholly reserved for our friends the French. Happy French: especially just now.]

Nevertheless, notwithstanding these criticisms in detail, he proceeds, the general aspect of London has something which astonishes, and causes a sort of stupor—it is in truth a capital in the sense of civilisation; all is great, splendid, disposed according to the last improvements. The streets are too large, too vast, too light; the preservation of material facilities is carried to the extremest degree. Paris, in this respect is at least a hundred years behindhand, and, to a certain extent, must always be inferior to London. The English houses are built very slightly, because the ground on which they stand does not belong to the builders; all the land is possessed, as in the middle ages, by a very small number of lords, or millionaires, who permit it to be built upon for a certain rent; this permission lasts only for a certain time, and the builders arrange that the houses last no longer. From this cause, joined to the fragility of the materials employed, London is renewed every thirty years, and so, as they say, can follow the progress of civilisation. The Squares, which are numerous, happily correct the evils of the sewers. The former often communicate one with another, and occupy an immense space. They have built some magnificent squares near Hyde-park, to be inhabited by the nobility. No shop, no warehouse disturbs the aristocratic quiet of these elegant Thebans. It is much to be desired that squares should be introduced in Paris, where the tendency is for the houses to get closer and closer to each other, and where vegetation and verdure will ultimately disappear altogether. Nothing is more charming than these large spaces, tranquil, green, and fresh. It is right to say that I never saw any

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